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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Ambassador Collins

*File - Cameron
Dien*

DATE: December 18, 1954

FROM : Randolph A. Kidder *RAK*

SUBJECT: Alternative to Diem Solution

I have attached a think piece, "Alternative to Diem Solution," drafted by Turner Cameron in which he outlines point of view somewhat similar to that which I discussed briefly with you yesterday after reviewing the draft of your TS telegram to the Department.

I think Turner's memorandum is worth reading. It takes a rather Machiavellian approach to French policy but advocates a line of action for us which would not irretrievably commit us should French policy be less Machiavellian than anticipated.



Attachment

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M E M O R A N D U M

December 17, 1954

TO: Randolph A. Kidder
Paul Sturm

FROM: Turner C. Cameron, Jr. *TCC*

SUBJECT: ALTERNATIVE TO DIEM SOLUTION

When the time comes to consider alternatives to the Diem solution, and in my opinion this moment is at hand, you may want to throw into the hopper for whatever it may be worth the following suggestion. It is basically a line of thought rather than a suggestion.

I have been convinced for some time that the French, both in the Ely-La Chambre talks and in the Mendes-France talks, agreed to support our position with respect to Diem because they were confident that this policy would fail in spite of all the support both countries were prepared to give him. I am further convinced that the French, in view of our Diem fixation, felt that this failure had to be a demonstrable one. In other words, it was necessary to clear the decks of Diem before the French could go into the next stage of their policy towards Vietnam.

On the same day that the NSC directive arrived, Ely and La Chambre were prepared to inform Ambassador Heath that even with American and French support the Diem solution was a proven failure. Our instructions based on the NSC direction merely postponed the reckoning and did not change French intentions. I think we can assume that the French have an alternative in mind and are willing to assume primarily responsibility for its implementation.

I suggest the time has come when we should:

- 1) verify what this French alternative is and
- 2) consider seriously giving it American acquiescence and even qualified support.

With respect to the content of the French alternative, Paris Embassy's telegram analyzing French policy in this area is, I think, a very revealing document. At the risk of over-simplification, I would say that post-Diem French plans for Vietnam have two major phases. The first phase probably consists in organizing a regime in Free Vietnam under strong French influence which would protect French interests, cultural, economic, prestige,

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until such time as it was decided that the second phase had become inevitable. This second phase, I am convinced, involves an effort to reach as advantageous as possible accommodation with the Viet Minh.

On the assumption that this is a rough statement of basic French intentions, I suggest that we explore the possibilities of turning this situation to our advantage. This involves a frank acceptance of the possibility that the ultimate effect would be a gradual U. S. withdrawal from Free Vietnam. However, it is essentially a time-gaining suggestion and during the time gained conditions may develop which would make complete U. S. withdrawal neither necessary or advantageous. In the meantime, the next defense line could be constructed.

During the first phase of post-Diem French policy towards Vietnam, I should think that qualified American assistance could be effectively used to prolong this phase. The amount of our assistance could probably be greatly reduced, except that earmarked for the French Expeditionary Corps. The savings could be devoted to strengthening the Burma-Laos-Cambodia line. The French must realize even now that U. S. assistance to Vietnam would cease when an accommodation was reached with the Viet Minh.

In sum, I am suggesting that we back away from Vietnam, let the French take the lead and responsibility with a frank realization on our part of where this may lead.

Aspects of such a decision on our part include:

- 1) Advantage of accepting a minor loss of prestige now, rather than a major defeat later on.
- 2) Gain time to prepare the new line of defense.
- 3) Use this decision in Indochina as a lever on French policy in Europe.
- 4) Place the responsibility for ultimate failure in Vietnam squarely on the shoulders which should bear the major burden. As far as the Far East is concerned, the French can afford much better than the U. S. to bear the loss of prestige.
- 5) This alternative contains the implication that our qualified assistance in Vietnam would be provided in effect to a line of French policy and not to any specific head of government.



In examining alternatives to the Diem solution, I feel strongly that we should avoid thinking in terms of finding a specific successor whom we would then be obligated to support. Such an action would lead us to compound the error of supporting Diem. If we follow this line we will, I am sure, find history repeating itself in a relatively short time and we will,

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not have begun the construction of the next defense line. I feel we must act on the assumption that Free Vietnam does not possess the elements of strength and cohesion necessary to prevent its eventually falling under Viet Minh domination. Our qualified support of French post-Diem policy would permit us to hedge our bets if this assumption proved to be erroneous. If Free Vietnam was lost to the Viet Minh under a U. S. selected and supported successor to Diem, the unfortunate effects on U. S. prestige in this area would be uncalculable.



TCCameron, Jr.:ea:md

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